

**Themes, Symbolism and Imagery in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day***

by

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I was first introduced to Post-Colonial literature when as an Erasmus-student I attended Leeds University for a semester in 2007. I discovered soon that this was a type of literature that suited me very well. Each new novel took me to a different place on the map, and each novel gave me more insight into, understanding of, and admiration for far away cultures and peoples - from Achebe's Nigeria and Igbo culture in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) to Patricia Grace's Maori people in *POTIKI* (1986), not to mention Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980). I became completely absorbed into these novels and stories. I found Anita Desai especially interesting. Desai writes beautifully about everyday people who struggle with their own minds and thoughts, but she also manages to put her characters into an historical context. Her novels are filled with symbolism, and colours, animals, smells, and sounds all serve a purpose larger than themselves. This is one of the reasons why I got attracted to her as an author. She manages to write poetically about each individual character and yet tries to make them all as real as possible. At the same time, politics and history can be seen in the background throughout *Clear Light of Day*, as the Partition of British India in 1947 can be traced through the characters' various experiences. In that way we see in some detail how history has had an impact on people's personal lives. This is what makes the novel so interesting to read, and led me to choose to write about precisely this novel.

*Clear Light of Day* was first published in 1980. The novel deals with the aftermath of what happened in India during the partition in 1947, when British India became independent and was divided into Pakistan and India. Through families of varying types of cultural heritage the novel shows us some of the consequences the partition had for the nation as well as its impact on a personal level. Desai has said that she began with the image of a tunnel and that she 'thought it would be interesting for my characters in their old age to start digging this

hole in their past and to tunnel backwards ... in order to uncover the very roots of their lives ...' (Alam: 91).

Desai is famous for making use of various symbols to express feelings or create a certain kind of atmosphere in her novels, and *Clear Light of Day* is no exception. In this thesis I will show that the environment surrounding the Das family in many ways symbolizes the political situation in India after the partition. Each fictional character is made to represent Indian's dealing with life after partition; some left for Muslim Pakistan or to cities in India filled with a larger Muslim population (the Hyder Ali-family and Raja), some chose to leave India for a foreign country (Tara and Bakul), while most remained (Bim and Baba, as was natural for Hindus). *Clear Light of Day* focuses mainly on Bim (short for Bimla), and how her life has been in the years following Independence. Through the novel we are given a new image of those who stayed, and we see through Bim that it can be difficult to forget the past and move forward when everything around you reminds you of how it once used to be. Bim and her surroundings stay the same year after year, and, in Fakrul Alam's words, 'The decaying house of Old Delhi becomes a symbol of the passing of an older way of life to make room for a new and changing world' (Alam: 91).

*Clear Light of Day* is a novel of many themes, and I have chosen to focus on what I view as the most important themes of the novel; the political situation in India at this particular time, and also the (changing) position of women in Indian society. Further on I want to show how symbolism in Desai's *Clear Light of Day* can be interpreted on many levels. I will explore how the Das family can stand as a symbol itself of the history of India before, during, and after Independence. I will also explore Desai's use of imagery, and how this in effect creates tension in and gives a dynamic to the novel.

In this chapter I will start off with an introduction to Anita Desai. Her childhood memories from Delhi are especially relevant for *Clear Light of Day*, and it is therefore

important to have some background information about her life. The structure and technique of her writings will also be discussed here, as Desai is famous for the neat and tidy structure of her novels. An introduction to post-colonial and feminist theory will be needed in order to understand the context of the novel. *Clear Light of Day* is a post-colonial work, and so an introduction to what this really means is therefore in place here. It is equally important to introduce feministic theory as Desai focuses mainly on women and their situation in Indian society.

Chapter 2 will provide a brief introduction to the history of India in order to understand the setting and time of the novel, and the implications this has for the characters. I will show here how the Das family and their surrounding neighbours and friends can be seen as a microcosm for the political situation in India at this time. The rich culture of India is shown through the various characters, and we meet Hindus and Muslims from Delhi and Bengalis (like Dr. Biswas and his mother) living side by side before the partition. The characters of Raja and Hyder Ali are important here, since they show us how the relationship between Hindus and Muslims suddenly became complicated due to Independence. Through them and their families Desai shows us how the whole country struggled with adapting to the new political situation, and how people became uncertain of whom they could trust and who was now their enemy.

In the third chapter I will show how women's position in India is slowly changing, as the characters find themselves placed between tradition and modernity. While some have had their lives ruined by the expectations of those around them, others try to free themselves from conventional women's roles. The various female characters represent different choices women might have in real life, and hence they too can stand as a microcosm of the country.

In the fourth and last chapter I want to show how the novel is filled with symbolism not only on the political level, but also with the imagery of animals, of sounds, of smells and

of vegetation. Desai manages to create an almost unbearable tension and heat in the novel through this. I will show how the imagery underlines the characters of Tara and Bim, who provide us with their memories from the past.

### **1.1 Anita Desai**

Anita Desai was born in India in 1937. Her mother was from Germany while her father was from India. Their home was very Indian, Desai has said, but her mother's western background influenced the family in terms of music and literature. Growing up, Desai read the novels of Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and Jane Austin, to name a few. Through her novels it is clear that Woolf has had a great influence on Desai, and several critics compare Desai's work with Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Both *Clear Light of Day* and *To the Lighthouse* deal with childhood memories and how these in turn follow you as an adult. The characters' inner psychological journey is important for both Desai and Woolf.

Desai grew up in several Indian cities, Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai, among others. Through her mixed cultural background Desai learned German, Hindi and English. English was the language she was taught in school, and as a consequence it became her written language, and she considers German and Hindi to be her oral languages. It has therefore never been a deliberate choice for Desai to write in English, rather, it has been a very natural development.

Desai's mother did not like the idea of sending her children to boarding schools in England, as was common for many upper class Indians at the time, who sent their children to England so that they would learn the English culture and history better. Desai, however, went to school in India. The school she attended was Christian and English. Desai has explained that the only reason for sending her to this school was that it was closest to their home. Her classmates were both Hindus and Muslims. Desai has said that the India she knew before

Independence was a country that accepted a wide range of religious cultures: 'For the most time I've lived in India, in a home where cultures combined rather than clashed' (Alam: 97). It was at school that she first was taught about Urdu, and the rich Islamic culture of her country. Although *Clear Light of Day* cannot be considered as an autobiographical work, the novel includes memories from Desai's own childhood: the neighbourhood in Old Delhi, the house, and the four siblings. Desai considers the novel to be her most autobiographical to this day, even though the characters are fictional. She can remember how the Muslim neighbours in Delhi packed their belongings and left the country when Independence reached India in 1947, and how her schoolmates from then on consisted of only Hindus. The memories of this can be traced in *Clear Light of Day* with the Muslim Hyder Ali and his family, who leave Delhi when partition is a fact. Desai has said of the experience that it seemed to her 'completely unnatural and an abnormality that there should be a society so divided' (Alam: 88).

Desai was from the age of 9, when she published her first story in a magazine for children's literature, considered the author of the family. She has explained her passion for writing as something that developed very naturally as a consequence of the books she read as a child. Still, living in a time when women's and men's roles were much more separated than today, Desai has said that when she married at the age of 21 she felt that her writings did not fit into this new life of hers. As a result, she wrote always in privacy: 'I continued to write but almost in secret, without anyone observing me at work at my desk so as not to create an open conflict.' She found time to write when her children were at school or out playing (Alam: 89).

Desai said in a rare interview given in 1988 that 'I feel about India as an Indian, but I suppose I think about it as an outsider' (Ho: 1). This enables her to write about India with clarity and awareness. In her novels Desai 'addresses the lives of women caught between tradition and modernity, the disintegration of the joint family, cultural differences in



encounters between East and West, and the politics of language in a multilingual society' (Alam: 87). Desai is famous for writing about people who for various reasons find themselves 'marginalized, displaced, and dispossessed' (Ho: 1). Her characters often search for a world they can feel at ease with, a world that is outside the social and cultural norms they live with. The need for self identification is at the core. As we will see, the search for identity is also important in *Clear Light of Day*. In her own words, she is 'interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into despair and so turned against the general current' (Sali: 1). It is said about Anita Desai that she is an author who brings her view of India to the reader. In *Clear Light of Day* we get to see an upper-middleclass Indian family and their everyday life. The characters struggle to find their place in the world, and with the memories of the past that haunt them in various ways. Desai has described *Clear Light of Day* as a 'four dimensional piece' (Sali: 6). Inspired by T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1978) the novel shows how time can be both a destroyer and a preserver, and it also shows 'what the bondage of time does to people' (ibid.).

Desai's concern for women and their situation in society is present in *Clear Light of Day*. It is said that characterization is what is most important for Desai: 'The portrayal of the woman, her emotional and psychological crisis, her status in the traditional Indian society, her responses to her surroundings, her physical and mental tortures, her ways to come out to surmount her calamities find the central place in Desai's novel' (Sali: 148). Through the characters of Bim and Tara we see the choices women have and do not have, and we see their willingness or un-willingness to overcome the expectation of their society. Women are to some extent imprisoned by their surroundings and by themselves because they have accepted their place in 'a domestic milieu' (Ho: 21). As the women's private spheres turn into prisons the characters must work with their own image of selfhood in order to liberate themselves

from the positions in which society has placed them. As we will see from *Clear Light of Day* memory becomes an important key in doing this.

The Partition in 1947 and the implications this had for individual lives and families in India are shown only through a character's memory of this particular event, and the history itself is only in the background of the events of the novel. Elaine Yee Lin Ho says that 'India' in Desai's fiction is the hours, days, and years of 'India' at home, even though that homeliness is haunted by spectres from the past, and disrupted by the tumult of everyday present' (Ho: 4). *Clear Light of Day* shows us how individuals are shaped in the midst of important historical happenings. Lin Ho argues that the characters 'revisit their own pasts in order better to comprehend the truth about themselves and their relations with each other, and it is precisely this appeal to truth which underwrites memory's unpredictability, and orients its mobile energies towards the reparations of the self and history' (Ho: 33). Desai has said that she views the world as an iceberg where 'the one-tenth above the surface of the water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things' (Sali: 9).

## 1.2 Structure and technique in *Clear Light of Day*

*Memory is a strange bell –  
Jubilee and knell*

*See, now they vanish,  
The faces and places, with the self which, as  
it could, loved them,  
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.*

The mottos chosen from *Clear Light of Day* are drawn from the poems of Emily Dickinson and T.S. Eliot. They let us know that this will be a novel about memory: about places and people who go through change and transformation in an attempt to find their true identities. B. R. Rao has said that 'Each novel of Mrs. Desai is a masterpiece of technical skill'. In *Clear Light of Day* Desai portrays her characters through various uses of symbols and images, and

the language is often very poetic. Desai's protagonists 'associate their emotions and feelings with the buds, flower [*sic.*], petals, birds, animals and insects around them' (Sali: 125). At the very beginning of *Clear Light of Day* we see that already on the first two pages we are given the images of singing koels, of ants, of a rose garden, of a snail. All images that bring Tara right back to her childhood and to bitter sweet memories. By making use of flashbacks and stream of consciousness Desai 'steers her story and unravels the hidden thoughts and feelings and emotions of her characters' (Sali: 16, 162).

Desai's novels are known to be well organized, and *Clear Light of Day* is no exception. Desai's novels are usually divided into either three or four parts, and *Clear Light of Day* is divided into four unnamed parts. The division often conveys symbolism and meaning. Desai takes liberties with chronology and 'there is a constant intermingling of the past and present with a hint of the foreboding future' in the novel (Sali: 148). The first chapter deals with the present time, and we are introduced to the characters as they are now. The two sisters are re-united after some years apart. Tara, who is married to a diplomat, is back in India to attend their brother's daughter's marriage in Hyderabad. Tara's first stop on her journey however, is in Old Delhi to visit Bim in their childhood home. The second and third chapters deal with the memories of the past, and through Bim and Tara we are taken back to the years around the partition. The relationships among the siblings are described here, as well as their relationship to their parents and their aunt. The political situation in India before, during, and after the partition can be traced through the characters and their different experiences. The third chapter also reveals the 'predicament of aunt Mira' through a series of events (Sali: 148). In the fourth and last chapter the characters find themselves in the present again, but now with a profound realisation which they lacked in the first chapter. Bim, who has struggled with anger and bitterness, now realises that she has to make peace with herself and the ghosts from her past in order to live a full and meaningful life.

By shifting between present and past time, between what happens between Bim and Tara ‘now’ versus past memories, moments of importance are revealed slowly. From the very beginning we sense that the tone between Bim and Tara is a bit tense. Bim is at times ironic and sarcastic towards her sister, and Tara’s experience is that ‘the elder sister did not take the younger seriously’ (4). We also hear of Raja, and his closeness to Bim as a child, and that this changed as they grew up. At times it is as if she longs for him: “I and Raja,” Bim mused, continuing to look up at the sky [...] “I and Raja” she said, “I and Raja” (25). By giving the reader these glimpses of almost forgotten feelings Desai reveals that there is something lurking below the surface. We learn about Bim from Tara, and about Tara from Bim. The sisters themselves must work in order to understand why the other sister acts and feels as she does. Early on for instance, we see how Tara is shocked by Bim’s negative attitude towards Raja:

Tara was too astounded, and too stricken to speak. Throughout her childhood, she had always stood on the outside of that enclosed world of love and admiration in which Bim and Raja moved, watching them, sucking her finger, excluded. Now here was Bim, cruelly and wilfully smashing up that charmed world with her cynicism, her criticism (26).

The feeling of bitterness, anxiety, uncertainty, and chaos can be traced from the very beginning of the novel through the conversations between the two sisters, and it creates a gradually increasing tension in the novel. The world is shown as a place that can be confusing, exciting, and dangerous. It is in constant change, both in the neighbourhood of Old Delhi, and in the rest of the country. The children of the Das family grew up in a time of political unrest and uncertainty. Their parents failed to create a safe and stable home for them, and this failure haunts the characters as grown-ups. Tara, for instance, suffers as a child, and feels unsafe and unprotected. As a result she wants a husband who can protect her and take care of her, and give her the stability her parents never gave her. Bim, on the other hand, is left to manage on her own. She lives in clutter and dust, and as a result her life becomes

overshadowed by all the things she holds on to. To Tara's surprise Bim still has everything that their parents owned: 'Had she developed no taste of her own, no likings that made her wish to sweep the old house of all its rubbish and place in it things of her own choice?' (21). Desai has said that her novels are a 'private effort to seize upon the raw material of life its shapelessness, meaninglessness, the lack of design that drives one to despair' (URL: 1). Life can be complicated and lack structure, and this is shown through the characters in *Clear Light of Day*. Both for herself, for the readers, and for her characters, structure is needed in order to create balance between the organized and unorganized. It is easier to see the meaning of life, and to see things in a clear perspective, through the structure.

Desai uses imagery and symbolism as a way of creating order in her novels. She often links her characters to something in nature or in history to give an indication to where the novel is heading. She is also careful to choose names that can give the readers a clue as to what will happen. This can be seen for instance in *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). The great-granddaughter of Nanda Kaul is named Raka, which means the moon (Desai 1999: 39). More specifically, the name means moon at full glory. The full moon often symbolizes that something dangerous or frightening will happen. In one episode the moon looks like it is on fire so much so that Raka thinks she is seeing a real fire, no coincidence since the novel ends with a huge fire in the mountains, started by Raka. This way of using names in order to structure and order her novels can also be seen in *Clear Light of Day*. The meaning of some of the characters' names immediately gives a clue to what will happen in the novel, and helps link their lives together. The name of the Muslim neighbour of the Das family, Hyder Ali, is also the name of a Muslim ruler and commander who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hyder Ali lived from 1722-1782, and was the ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore in southern India. The use of his name brings memories of a time when the Moghul Empire ruled India, and when Islamic culture flourished. The fictional character of Hyder Ali is presented as a great man on

a white horse, who is culturally superior to his Hindu neighbours. Before he flees Delhi for Hyderabad he symbolises the days when India still managed to preserve some of the magic from the Islamic cultural heritage.

Raja is Bim and Tara's brother. Within Islam Raja means king. Raja has always admired Hyder Ali, and the two manage to become friends despite all their differences. It is no surprise to the reader that Raja married Hyder Ali's daughter. In a way it had to happen; the leader needed an heir, and the future king needed an 'empire': 'there was something gently loving in his gesture of placing his arm across the boy's shoulders as he came up, somehow making Raja think that Hyder Ali had no son, only a daughter – a curious thought, never spoken of, yet clearly felt' (56). His name is also representative of how Raja wants to be perceived by those around him. Raja says that when he grows up he wants to be a hero. One way of achieving this is by destroying his parents' bridge cards; 'Raja used to swear that one day he would leap up onto the table in a lion-mask, brandishing a torch, and set fire to this paper world of theirs' (22). It is interesting that he wants to wear a lion's mask since the lion is often considered to be the 'king of the jungle'. This might be an indication of how Raja wants his sisters to see him. As he later on takes on a new role in the family as a landlord he has in one way become their king. He has the power in his hands to control the destiny of Bim and Baba as they are materially dependent on him to be able to keep their house.

The name of Bim can also be said to give us an idea of what will happen. Bimla means 'untouched', and is a good description of how Bim ends up living her life. She will let no man decide how she is to lead her life, and ends up not marrying at all. Baba is the youngest son in the Das family, and the meaning of his name is 'father' or 'elder', and can be a fairly neutral term. But just like the father of the children was never there mentally, only physically, Baba, because of his mental handicap, is always there physically but not mentally. Though his name ironically means father Baba will always be the baby of the family, and he will always need

mothering from Bim. Tara means 'star'. As the wife of a diplomat she struggles to always shine in front of him, and to be a good wife and mother. She struggles to be perfect, like a shining star.

### **1.3 Post-Colonial and Feminist Theory**

Post-colonial and feminist theory and critique are important when reading *Clear Light of Day*. The family can be seen as a microcosm of what happened with the country, and post-colonial theory is therefore relevant. Feminist theory is also important as Desai herself chooses to write mainly about women and their different situations in life. Desai says her reasons for writing about women are quite obvious: 'Of course I have written largely – although not exclusively - about women and women's worlds, simply because that is what I know best.' (Alam: 97). Their different solutions to how to deal with the fact that they are marginalized by society is shown through her various characters.

Post-colonialism is a direct effect of the colonial era when various countries in Africa, Asia, South-America, etc., were colonized by many European empires. The term post-colonialism has since the 1970s been used by critics to discuss various cultural and political effects of colonisation (Ashcroft et al 2007: 168). For the colonisers everyone who was not of European origin and who did not have a European way of thinking and living were characterised as an 'other', as something different than the 'normal'. Abdul. R. Janmohamed says that

Genuine and thorough comprehension of Otherness is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture. [...] the colonizers invariable assumption about his moral superiority means that he will rarely question the validity of either his own or his society's formation and that he will not be inclined to expend any energy in understanding the worthless alterity of the colonized (Ashcroft et al 2006: 19).

One of Africa's most famous writers, Chinua Achebe, made his debut in 1958 with *Things Fall Apart*. The novel has since been considered one of the best examples of how post-colonial literature gives its people a part of their history back. The oral expressions, the riddles, proverbs, songs, and stories handed down over generations and shared by the whole community are clearly shown through this novel. Achebe and other post-colonial writers show us that 'folk tales' are integral parts of the fabric of personal and social life, and to ignore them is to ignore the cultural history of a nation. Post-colonial literature and theory refer to Europe's former colonisers and to authors from former colonies that are now writing about questions of history, identity, ethnicity, gender, and language. The challenges facing decolonisation and the transitions to independence and post-independence in a wide variety of political and cultural contexts are important. Much post-colonial literature records the day-to-day existence of ordinary people; by giving them a voice and a character, post-colonial writers seek to recover the people who truly mattered to history but who, for political and related reasons were written out. Language is also important when dealing with post-colonial literature. Language is bound to culture and identity, and the colonisers imposed the English language on the colonized people. Some post-colonial authors choose to write in their original language, whereas others, such as Achebe, chose English to reach out to a broader audience.

Through post-colonial literature acknowledgement of women's experience started growing, and authors like Jean Rhys, Anita Desai, and Grace Nichols placed women at the centre of history, as makers and agents of history, not silent witnesses to it.

Feminism is a term many non-western women try to steer away from as many see the exclusive focus on women as 'a divisive factor that endangers third world solidarity against the forces of global capitalism and neo-colonialism' (Mathur 1996). Although Desai certainly writes about women and their situation in India, it has been claimed that she does not focus on a feministic approach first and foremost. Her focus and interest lie in the human psyche; how



it works and controls a person's life choices. She does not exclude men from her books, and shows awareness that all women do not experience the same situations, and that a universal sisterhood can be difficult to trace. Still, I would argue that women and their position in the family and within society is very present in *Clear Light of Day*, and as several critics have pointed out, the women in *Clear Light of Day* all show a moral dimension which the men seem to lack. Desai shows us various types of women, and through these characters she shows an awareness of gender and how it matters in a woman's life, whether at home or in public. Even among family members women are very different. Bim and Tara are sisters who grew up together, yet they view the world differently, and they have different approaches to how to cope in it. They both struggle to find their true identities, and their choices in how to live their lives differ tremendously. It is the inner world of each character that is interesting for Desai, and this is what makes her characters so real and vulnerable. Desai has a competent way of portraying her female characters, and she is known for her 'feminine sensibility' (Mathur 1996) in her novels, and especially in *Clear Light of Day*. Desai is aware that all humans 'need love, acceptance, understanding, belonging, success, recognition, and satisfying patterns in life' (Tiwari: 2).

Post-colonial theory and feminist theory have many things in common, as they both 'seek to reinstate the marginalized in the face of the dominant' (Ashcroft et al 1989: 175). Women are often seen as marginalised and as 'other', often repressed and oppressed by the male population. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defines a person, most often a woman, who is not heard by those around her and who has no chance of climbing the social ladder as a 'subaltern' (Ashcroft et al 2006: 28). The question is whether a subaltern person can represent him- or herself, or whether s/he needs a representative who speaks on behalf of him- herself. There are different ways of representing a person. Generally speaking, one can say that there are two ways of representation that run together: 'representation as 'speaking for', as in

politics, and representation as ‘re-presentation’, as in art or philosophy’ (ibid.). Further on, as Foucault and Deleuze point out, ‘*Because* “the person who speaks and acts...is always a multiplicity,” no “theorizing intellectual...[or] party or...union” can represent “those who act and struggle”’ (Ashcroft et al 2006: 28). They further ask whether ‘those who act and *struggle* are mute, as opposed to those who act and *speak*?’ (ibid.). Deleuze and Foucault argue that the intellectuals who try to represent the subaltern will only represent themselves as transparent, and therefore they will not manage to represent the subaltern (ibid.). An example of this is how the English upper-class in India wanted a small Indian upper-class who had learned the English language, values, and ways to behave. This class was then supposed to teach the uneducated lower Indian classes how to live their lives. Macauley said in his *Minute on Indian Education* from 1835 that this class should be ‘interpreters between us and the millions we govern’ (Ashcroft et al 2006: 31). The elite would then speak for, and represent, all Indians. But can an upper class gentleman really understand how it is to live the life of a poor, uneducated woman? If the subaltern is always represented by others and never allowed to represent herself or himself, can she or he speak? And women, who are often referred to as ‘doubled other’, will they have a more troublesome way in order to express their opinions? Spivak argues that ‘both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant’ (Ashcroft et al 2006: 32). Spivak uses a young Indian woman, Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, as an example. She committed suicide in 1926 while menstruating, thus making it clear, according to Spivak, that her death would not be represented as a result of illicit pregnancy. Spivak interprets her suicide as an attempt to speak with her body. Her attempt failed as no one cared or wanted to understand, and her death was read as a result of an illicit love affair, which later turned out to be false. Spivak, who asked whether the subaltern could speak or not, says that the subaltern cannot

speaking because they will always be misinterpreted or misunderstood, just like Bhubaneswari was.

The term 'other' has been used in Post-colonialism to describe those who are physically, culturally or verbally different than what the colonisers have termed as normal. All that is different from the European white male is constructed as 'other'. Today many post-colonial writers and scholars work towards the same goals where they speak up for those who are silenced, and for those who do not have any opportunity to argue their own case. In traditional Indian society where women have been marginalised and kept out of the work force we see that they have in many ways become a 'double other'. They are both colonised by the imperial power and by the men of their own race because of their gender. We see this represented in both Bim, Tara, and their aunt Mira, among others, in Desai's novel. Cindy Lacom argues that in addition to these women, a very important group among the suppressed has been left out for years. She argues that those who are disabled physically or mentally also can be categorised as a 'double other'. The 'doubled other' in *Clear Light of Day* can be said to be not only Bim and Tara, who as sisters with very different attitudes and expectation of a woman's behaviour, and therefore do not understand each other, but also Baba who is mentally challenged. As a person with a mental condition Baba has problems speaking, and can only express his feelings through body signs. Further, he does not understand fully everything that happens around him, and will therefore not be able to defend himself against or represent himself against the world outside his bedroom.

## CHAPTER 2: THE SUMMER OF 1947

### 2.1 The Partition of British India and its aftermath

*Clear Light of Day* shows us glimpses of India from the 1940s up to the 1970s. These years were a time of transformation and change. British India became two countries, creating huge Diasporas, a new social order, and an Indian society which slowly tried to find its own identity separated from that the British colonisers had given them. In the midst of this we get to see the inner life of an Indian upper-middle class family and their struggle to fit into society. The Das family is an Indian Hindu family who are very much influenced by the English upper class, and who as a consequence do not fit into the new modern India which is created through Independence. To use Lacom's words: 'Desai uses the family as a microcosm for larger national concerns' (Lacom: 142).

Talks of an independent India began in the early Twentieth century with different voices wanting different things for an Independent India. The opposition between the Hindu wing, represented by Ghandi and Nehru, and the Muslim wing, by Jinnah, grew, and it eventually became clear that the country needed to be divided in two; Pakistan and India. Questions such as 'Who was now an Indian or a Pakistani?' and 'Was citizenship underpinned by a shared religious faith, or was it a universal right, guaranteed by a state that promised equality and freedom to all?' (Khan: 4) were suddenly being raised, and people were unsure of where they belonged and where they should go.

On August 14 and 15, 1947, British India became history, and it was divided into two countries, India and Pakistan. Many Muslims went to Pakistan and many Hindu's went to India in order to ally themselves with the new national identities that were created. People left places they had always belonged to in order to get to the place where they felt they were most accepted. Loss of familiarity with place, of belonging to a place, of friends and family, were

some of the effects this had on people. ‘People lost their properties, valuables and other belongings; they lost their homes where they were born and bred’ (Yousaf: 272). Cut off from all familiar ties many people experienced a sense of panic and desperation. The characters in *Clear Light of Day* also experience this, and we hear that ‘The city was in flames that summer [...] flames of orange and pink [...] the sound of shots and of cries and screams’ (44). In *Clear Light of Day* Desai writes about many of the side effects the partition had on people all over India, both for Muslims and for Hindus. She writes about both those who stayed behind, and about those who left, and we see that everyone experienced some sort of loss and trauma due to the summer of 1947.

Khan says that ‘as refugees arrived in India and Pakistan they were encouraged to see themselves in a new light – to set aside their hardships momentarily and to appreciate that they were now, after all, independent citizens of free countries’ (Khan: 175). As New Delhi was filled with optimistic people who celebrated their new beginning, Old Delhi remained the same, filled with people Hindus (on the whole) who naturally chose to stay. This is where we find our main character in *Clear Light of Day*, Bim.

One of the effects of the movement of Muslims to Pakistan was that a part of India’s cultural heritage disappeared. The language of Urdu was regarded as high culture before the partition of India, and in the aftermaths of the partition Urdu became a language that one no longer was taught in schools, and it became very difficult to find places where one could learn the language. As we read from *Clear Light of Day* we learn that ‘Urdu had been the court language in the days of the Muslim and Moghul rulers and had persisted as the language of the learned and cultivated’ (47). The neighbours (and landlords) of the Das family are Muslims. Hyder Ali is remembered by Tara as the man who ‘had cultivated the best roses in Old Delhi and given parties to which poets and musicians came. Their parents were not among his friends’ (7). The distinction between the two families is clear here. Hyder Ali is a

man who is proud to represent his own cultural heritage, and his identity is linked to his religion and culture. The Das family represent British culture more than Indian culture, and do not have a clear identity linked to being Indian or British as a consequence. The glamour that is represented at Hyder Ali's house is seen by Raja as 'almost a shocking contrast to the shabbiness of their own house' (49). Urdu poetry is read and enjoyed here and 'Raja naturally inclined towards society, company, applause; towards colour, song, charm' (49). Hyder Ali can see his interest for poetry, and invites him over for poetry nights. Raja becomes a regular guest in his house, even though he is a Hindu and not a Muslim. The issue of Pakistan is being discussed at the Hyder Ali house, and although Raja is a Hindu, he is starting to see things more and more as Muslims do:

Glasses of whisky were passed around, some poetry quoted, and soon they forgot Raja, or Raja's Hindu presence, and picked up the subject they had dropped on seeing him – Pakistan, as ever Pakistan. Raja listened silently as they spoke of Jinnah, of Ghandi and Nehru, of Mountbatten and Attlee and Churchill, because he knew this was not a matter in which he should express his opinion, but he listened and he began to see Pakistan as they did – as a possibility, very close to them, palpable and real (57).

Whereas Urdu was considered to be the language of the cultivated and learned, Hindu was 'not then considered a language of great pedigree' (157). There was appreciation of the oral tradition and culture in reciting the poems, in writing poems in Urdu, and in setting music to Urdu text. In the years following the partition it became difficult for Hindu people to study Urdu and Islamic culture. 'Tara, glancing down at them, saw they were in Urdu, a language she had not learnt' (26-27). A loss of language also means a loss of music, and a loss of an oral culture. Few people in India would be able to understand the music and poems that are in Urdu without knowing the language. Raja's passion for the Islamic culture can be seen as Desai's memories of the pre-partition India where the different cultures could co-exist peacefully (Ho: 37).

## 2.2 The family and Old Delhi as a microcosm

In the spring of 1947 India's population prepared itself for the partition, which now seemed inevitable. One did not know what to expect from the partition, and uncertainty and fear were in the air that summer. Each character in *Clear Light of Day* creates an image of how different Indians reacted during the time of partition. By connecting the stories of Hindus and Muslims Desai shows how the two groups once lived side by side as friends. As the country is filled with unease and anxiety Raja falls ill, and his illness, and the illness of their home, are in many ways a symbol of the condition of India at this point.

Raja, who longs to be a hero, and who wants to fight for the people he loves, falls ill with tuberculosis the spring of 1947, and is nursed by Bim throughout the summer: 'I ought to be out in the streets – fighting the mobs – saving Hyder Ali and Benazir –' (59). His illness is representative for the country's state. Just as Raja falls ill and his surroundings do not know if he will survive, India also fell ill metaphorically in a way, and no one knew if 'she' would be able to recover. Raja's surroundings blame everything around them for his disease:

His father and aunt were convinced it was something to do with the atmosphere of that spring, the threatening violence in the air at one with the dust storms that gathered and broke, the koels that called frantically in the trees all day, the terrific heat that was already rising out of the parched, cracked yellow earth, and all the rumours that drifted in from the city like sand, or smoke (57).

A series of negative events that summer shows the negative climate surrounding the family, and prepares them in a way for the partition. The spring starts with a quarrel between Raja and his father about Raja going to Jamia Milla College or not. 'You can't study there [...] It's a college for Muslim boys' (51). Suddenly it is no longer safe for a Hindu boy to specialise in Islamic studies. Raja has only seen one side of the story, and is surprised when he hears his father's argument: 'There is going to be trouble, Raja – there are going to be riots and slaughter [...] you will be burnt alive' (52). His father's refusal to let him go to Jamia Milla College symbolises change in the nation. Indians can no longer attend colleges with a

different religious background than themselves. Raja, to his disappointment, starts studying English literature, at a college his father has approved. The students there turn out to be very politically aware, and are described as political fanatics who act together with ‘politicians and fanatics from outside’ who successfully infiltrate the student campus (54-55). ‘The boys there saw an easy recruit but had no inkling that Raja’s true and considered reaction to their fanatical Hindu beliefs would be one of outrage and opposition’ (55). Raja has learned to know and love his Muslim neighbours over the years, and will have nothing to do with the boys and their beliefs: ‘There was an immediate clash between them that roused each of them to greater, wilder enthusiasm for his particular cause. The atmosphere was so explosive, the air vibrated with threats and rumours of violence and enmity’ (55). Both India as a country and the Das family are arguing over issues dealing with religion and politics. The students also symbolise the change that has been made since their fathers attended college. Politics and religion is now much more important than when their fathers went there, and they are willing to do everything in order to fight for what they believe in.

In the midst of this the mother of the house falls ill and is rushed to the hospital. She dies not long after this ‘without seeing any of them again’ (53). Her death is hardly noticed by her children since she was never present for them. Feeling guilty for not missing her, or even noticing that she had passed away, the children decide to keep their guilt a secret: ‘Their secret replaced their mother’s presence in the house, a kind of ghostly surrogate which they never quite acknowledged and quite often forgot’ (54). At the same time as the mother is dying *Mira-masi* starts acting weirdly around the house, but as everyone is occupied with his or her own things, her behaviour is not noticed. Perturbed by the whispering around the neighbourhood and by the talks from the father she is worried about Raja: ‘“But Muslims – it isn’t safe,” her aunt whispered, trembling. ‘Oh, Bim,’ she said distractedly, ‘won’t you get me your father’s brandy bottle from the sideboard? A drop – just a drop in my tea – I do need it –



it might help – it isn't safe...' (56). Mira's drinking problem reflects the feeling of anxiety, fear, and loss of control. She can do nothing to improve the situation in the home, just like Raja can do nothing to improve the situation of Muslims. Not knowing what might happen, and fearing for themselves and their loved ones, many Indians struggled when coping with everyday life, just like Mira-*masi*. She also represents all those people who due to the partition suddenly could not trust people with a different religious background than their own. Mira-*masi* knows that Hyder Ali has always been good to Raja, yet the whispering from people around her influence her in a negative way. Also Hyder Ali's servant fears for his life because he did not turn Hyder Ali and his family in when they were leaving for Hyderabad. The servant is now afraid and he regrets his loyalty towards Hyder Ali. This only shows how people act when they are afraid of their own lives. Neighbours who once were friends were suddenly turning against each other.

As Raja is home being nursed by Bim, the college boys decide to pay him a visit as they are determined to have him on their side: 'they told him they were not giving in cravenly to the partitioning of the country no matter what Ghandi or Nehru did – they were going to defend their country, their society, their religion' (57). When they discovered that Raja did not share their view 'they turned on him openly, called him a traitor' (57). After this a policeman starts showing up outside the Das home, watching over Raja as if he were a criminal. This symbolises how Indians who did not stick to their 'right' side during the fights over partition were often seen as dangerous for the country. It is ironic that the boys, who called themselves terrorists and who would gladly use violence in order to win, would not be seen as dangerous, whereas Raja, who is sick with tuberculoses, and who has done nothing wrong other than protecting his friends, ironically is considered, by some, as an enemy of the state. It is also interesting that the boys here will not listen to Ghandi, who wanted a non-violence campaign. As Hindus and Muslims continued to argue over India and Pakistan that summer, we see in

the novel that the neighbourhoods gradually change: 'Had they already gone to the Pakistan that was to be? Raja wondered' (56). The classrooms gradually change, and Bim says that 'None of the Muslim girls come any more' (59). These events are, as already mentioned, events that Desai herself experienced. Hyder Ali's house also strengthens the reader's feeling of how the partition has torn the country in two. Before Independence the house is filled with life. During the summer of 1947 this changes, and all that is left of Hyder Ali and his family's life there is material things which they could not manage to bring with them. The Persian glamour he had given the neighbourhood disappeared. This is a symbol of how the cultural diversity in India was challenged as people were forced to move out of their homes and go elsewhere for safety. Waiting for Tara to come home one evening Bim finds herself worried: 'for unease was in the air like a swarm of germs, an incipient disease. The empty house across the road breathed it at them. Its emptiness and darkness was a warning, a threat perhaps' (62).

As the tension in the country is getting worse as a consequence of the violence and disturbance of the summer, the problems in the Das family keep getting worse as well. When their father suddenly dies in a mysterious car accident, they lose their economical provider, and problems around their business create tension between Raja and Bim. Mr. Sharma comes over to discuss the family business with the family, and we learn that there is a curfew at night. This tells us that it is dangerous to walk outside at night. Although Old Delhi is not directly affected by the violence in the country, one can still hear the riots and fights that go on in the city. Bakul's warning that there will be trouble creates further tension in the novel, as we know something dangerous will happen (70).

In the midst of the chaos and stress Baba brings home his gramophone. The music from this only adds stress to the house. The annoying American music penetrates every corner of the house. In contrast to Baba's pop music we hear of Dr. Biswas dreams of 18<sup>th</sup> century European music. The irony of his choice of music is that India at this point is trying to rid

itself of the Englishness that has influenced the country for so long, but all he does is to long for it. (80) The music from the gramophone and the 18<sup>th</sup> century music symbolises how India is in between tradition and modernity, and how this is in constant change. Another example of this is that Tara does not need an approval from Bim to marry, only she can decide for herself what she wants. Her decision to marry Bakul makes Tara a part of the Diaspora that came as a result of the partition. With Tara out of the country, and the parents who have died, the relationship between Bim and Raja grows stronger as they are the only ones remaining in Old Delhi. This makes it all the more painful for Bim when he decides to leave her to start his life (100).

All the events that happened in the family and in the old neighbourhood in Old Delhi are symbols of what happened to India the summer of 1947. The Anglicised India which the Das family knew of was suddenly threatened by the partition. The death of the mother and father symbolises in many ways the death of the Anglicised India. As India is moving towards freedom the country searches for its own identity, something in between the old traditional India and the new modern world. Something that is not English, something that the everyday Indian can feel connected to on a personal level. The mother of the Das children are so anglicised that she would not be able to connect to this new India. And as India finally breaks with Great Britain she, and her class, are no longer needed as a connecting point between England and India. Mrs. Biswas, on the other hand, who does not speak English and who has not belonged to the upper class, is now, with her Indian traditions and attitudes, moving upwards on the social ladder. This is why she can scrutinise Bim for her 'rude' behaviour towards her. These two very different mothers represent therefore India during the partition. As British India is divided into two countries in the search for their true identities, British India will only exist in history. The battle within the family, with disease and alcohol consumption, symbolises the fight India and Indians are facing on their journey of identity

and nation building. Just as the characters find the road confusing and frightening, India and Pakistan are facing a confusing and perhaps also threatening and dangerous future.

### CHAPTER 3: WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY

Nehru once said that ‘you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women’ (URL: 2). The women of India have for centuries been treated as less important than men. Violence against women has been fairly common, and especially so-called ‘dowry-burnings’ (Metcalf and Metcalf : 278). When an Indian girl marries, her parents are expected to give a dowry to her new husband and his family, often expensive gifts. When the husband is not satisfied with his dowry violence – physical or mental- has been used in order to get more from her parents. To avoid the situation with dowry gender determination has been common for years. Abortions of girls, killings of girl babies, and abandoning them, all this has resulted in an uneven ratio among men and women. Lower class women have also been seen as the prey of men with a higher caste, and rape has not been uncommon. Over the years, however, India is slowly trying to change the situation of women so that they can truly become citizens in a democratic society. In the 1980s and 1990s several laws which enforced women’s rights were introduced, and it is now up to the Indian society to adopt these laws so that women can be first class citizens just as their men are. *Clear Light of Day* was published in a time when change was slowly reaching India, and Desai shows India’s women in a wide range. The women show us how India stands in between tradition and modernity, and that there is hope for future generations. Through the different female characters in *Clear Light of Day* Desai has managed to show different solutions Indian women may choose in order to deal with a society that is in many ways run by men, for men. At the same time she also shows us a glimpse of women who never get to choose how to live their own lives.

As already mentioned, although Bim and Tara are sisters and grew up in the same household they have very different positions and attitudes towards women’s position in society and within the home. Growing up Bim is the girl who likes sports and who plays with

her brother, she is the sister who is not afraid of getting her hands dirty and who enjoys helping the poor and needy. She is always pushing the boundaries for how a girl in an anglicized upper-middle class Indian home should act. Tara, on the other hand, is more sensitive, and does not have the same needs and ambitions:

Bim of course worshipped Florence Nightingale along with Joan of Arc in her private pantheon of saints and goddesses, and Tara did not tell her that she hoped never to have to do anything in the world, that she wanted only to hide under Aunt Mira's quilt or behind the shrubs in the garden and never be asked to come out and do anything, prove herself to be anything (126).

Tara fills in many ways the traditional role of women as she is the feminine and fair girl who dreams of marriage and children rather than school and a career for herself. Bim, in contrast, is the modern girl who dreams of becoming a heroine rather than someone's wife and mother.

When their parents die it becomes Bim's role as the eldest to fend for her younger siblings and alcoholic aunt. Bim is given a new role within the family and society around her but she is not given a new social status. Her possibilities of a social life outside their home are weakened as a consequence of her acceptance of the new responsibilities (Tiwari: 184). By accepting the responsibility given her Bim gives her siblings Tara and Raja opportunities to leave Delhi in order to live their own lives. Tiwari argues that Bim claims a martyr-like role in regard to home and responsibility for her siblings and hence defines herself from these two points (Tiwari: 186). It becomes clear to the reader that both Tara and Bim have to re-evaluate who they are in society and within the family in order to discover their true identities (ibid.). Bim's dream of being a heroin is, in her eyes, crushed when she realises she is the one who has to take care of her family. Her role as a surrogate mother for her brother is unexpected, and she will not have a meaningful life until she learns to fully appreciate her situation. Tara, on the other hand, has to learn to deal with the fact that she left Bim behind to take care of everyone, while she moved (escaped) to a foreign country. As she returns many years later to

visit Baba and Bim her mind is troubled by the fact she ran away to a foreign country while Bim remained to take care of everyone.

While Bim has accepted her role without a protest she is still bitter and angry at her siblings who left her behind. Sudhakar T. Sali says that according to Indian custom 'Raja being a boy, should have shared the responsibility of taking care of Baba' (Sali :26). The fact that he does not help Bim shows us that he is not responsible, as Bim is, and he is more interested in pursuing his own dreams rather than helping his family when they need him. Bim's bitterness is reinforced when Raja sends her a letter where he tells her of the death of his father-in-law, Hyder Ali. Raja reassures Bim here that he '*shall never think of raising it [the rent] or of selling the house as long as you and Baba need it*' (7). Bim interprets this as his way of saying to her that he is now her landlord and hence her superior. The thought that she, who once nursed him and took care of him, should be thankful for his 'kindness' is offensive to her: 'You say that I should come to Hyderabad with you for his daughter's wedding. How can I? How can I enter his house – my landlord's house? I, such a poor tenant? Because of me, he can't raise the rent or sell the house and make profit – imagine that. The sacrifice!' (28). Tara cannot believe that her sister is still bitter, and wants Bim to know that this belongs to the past, and that Raja probably never meant to hurt her. However, Bim says 'Whenever I begin to wish to see Raja again or wish he would come and see us, then I take that letter and read it again' (28). It is significant that the letter from Raja lies among history books. As Tara takes a closer look at Sir Mortimer Wheeler's *Early India and Pakistan* she cannot help but think how 'relevant such a title was to the situation of their family, their brother's marriage to Hyder Ali's daughter' (28). The letter symbolises how Bim is not able to move on with her life, and that she holds on to the past in order to justify her anger towards Raja. It is ironic that Bim, the history professor, does not manage to see that the old letter that she holds on to has itself become history. Bim, who has dedicated her life to history, has

difficulties in separating what has happened in the past and what is happening now. She needs the letter, and the history of the letter, to be a part of her present life in order to uphold the bitterness she has become accustomed to have. Tara does not understand why she holds on to something that only harms her and Bim is determined 'not to tell her why she needed this bitterness and insult and anger' (29). Jenni Valjento claims that this comes 'from no opportunities to act and be perceived as the kind of woman she originally wanted to be, and from a repeated obligation to be the woman others need her to be' (Tiwari: 191). Raja and Bim originally dreamed of being a hero and a heroine, a dream neither of them reached. Bim is disappointed in Raja for not being the hero he wanted to be, and also for forcing Bim into a situation where she is not allowed to be the heroine she wanted to be. The modern woman she dreamed of being is forced into a traditional role where she takes care of her family, and where she is economically dependent on her brother.

Bim's bitterness towards those around her begins with their father's handling of the family-business. When he passed away Raja was the only one who had learned how to carry on with it, as he was the only son capable of doing this. Raja, however, is not interested in the business and leaves it to Bim to figure out what to do with it. Bim, since she is a girl, has been taught nothing about the firm by either Raja or their father. The angry resentment towards her father for not teaching her because she is a girl reflects in some ways the frustration many girls must have felt in not having the same opportunities as their brothers:

I don't understand the insurance business. Father never bothered to teach me. For all father cared I could have grown up illiterate and – and *cooked* for my living, or *swept*. So I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach. But father never realised – and Raja doesn't realise - that that doesn't prepare you for insurance business (155).

The feeling of being handicapped because she is not rightly equipped is present in many of Desai's novels. Through her novels Desai shows us that women of various classes have difficulties in managing in a society made for men. One example is *Fire on the*



*Mountain* where Ila Das, a poor social worker, is upset because ‘the women are willing, poor dears, to try and change their dreadful lives by an effort, but do you think the men will let them? Nooo, not one bit’ (Desai 1999: 19). Further on, Ila Das has realised that the British upbringing she once thought of as privileged does not help her to cope in the real world: ‘Isn’t it absurd [...] how helpless our upbringing made us, Nanda. We thought we were being equipped with the very best – French lessons, piano lessons, English governesses – my, all that to find it left us helpless, positively *handicapped*’ (Desai 1999: 127).

Mira-*masi* is another example of the tragic fate many Indian women have experienced. Mira-*masi* was a cousin of their mother’s who was sent for to take care of the children when their mother could no longer handle them. Mira-*masi* had had a hard life growing up poor, and she had been only ‘twelve years old when she married and was a virgin when she was widowed’ (108). Belonging to her husband’s family she was doomed to work for them, and had to carry the heavy burden of being blamed for his death: ‘it was her unfortunate horoscope that had brought it about, they said’ (108). As she was growing weaker and weaker his family was happy to get rid of the burden of having her there, and gladly sent her away to the Das family when they requested it. To the children she became the adult person they had missed; ‘She was the tree, she was the soil, she was the earth’ (111). After a hard life she is glad to come to take care of the Das children, she is glad of the appreciation the children show her for just being there for them. However, as time goes on and the political situation changes she grows more and more anxious, and does not manage to keep up with all that happens around her any more. She turns to the bottle for consolation, which in turn leads to her death.

A person like Mira-*masi* would end up far down in the social system. Spivak asks whether the subaltern can speak or whether she is silenced by the ruling elite. In many ways we see that a person like Mira-*masi* would have little to nothing to say about her situation. She lives on other people’s mercy, whether it is her husband’s family or under the roof of the

Das family. The way in which she greets her cousin shows that she is lower than her in the hierarchy, and therefore has to obey her. All her life she has done nothing to improve her situation. She is trapped in a system where she has no rights, partly because of her gender and partly because of her class. She lived her whole life as a subaltern who could not speak up about her situation. Her alcoholism is an expression of the frustration she feels after serving everyone around her all her life and never herself. Her death can to some extent be seen as a protest of a new generation of women who no longer want to please everyone but themselves. It can also be seen as a symbol of those who did not manage the emotional stress caused due to Independence and all the change it brought about.

Unfortunately, *Mira-masi*'s situation is far from unique in India. One evening when Bim talks to the father of the Misra house he complains to her about his sons' behaviour. While they drink all day and never work, their sisters support them. In his days, he says, things were different, and a man would take care of his sister if she had no husband: 'When my sister's husband died I brought her to live here with us. She lived here for years, she and her children. Perhaps she is still here, I don't know, I haven't seen her' (33). His ignorance about where she is and how she is doing tells us that she probably has had the same tragic life as *Mira-masi*. His attitude is also a reminder of the patriarchal system in India. What he views as kindness towards his sister is just as much a witness of the suppression of women. The widowed woman represents a problem for those living around her as she cannot support herself and her children. Unmarried women had to seek mercy at their brother's homes in order to survive, as there were no other places for them to go.

Like *Mira-masi* and other women in her situation, Baba, the mentally challenged brother and the youngest in the Das family, is also in some ways neglected by society. According to Lacom Desai uses Baba in order to serve a political and ideological purpose during the postcolonial moment in India at this time (Lacom: 138). She argues that disability

can be more visible and evident than skin colour, and that it therefore ‘becomes a visual means by which to define normalcy and, by extension, the nation’ (Lacom: 140). The former colonised men of India are struggling to find their true identity and to discover the true India. Their desire and wish for a new nation and their nation-building, suggest that a new group of people are now the colonised. Just like Jean-Paul Sartre suggests that European men ‘became men through creating slaves and monsters’ (Sartre 1963: 26, quoted in Lacom 141), Lacom suggests that ‘the colonized are only able to “become men”, to establish a normal identity in the historical moment of decolonization, through the reification of a new category of *monsters* – the disabled, the deformed, the mad’ (Lacom: 141).

As already mentioned, the relationship between Tara and Bim is tense due to their different situations. Whereas Bim stayed in Old Delhi, Tara left as soon as she could. The Americanised world in which Tara finds herself is unfamiliar to Bim, as the Americanised values have not yet penetrated Old Delhi. When Tara comes to live with Bim for the summer the two have to learn how to cope with the new and the old, and they have to find a way to make the two co-exist. In the middle of the two is Baba. Nothing ever changes around him. With Baba it is as if time stands still, and it is just the way he wants things to be. The gramophone constantly plays his favourite music and this makes him happy. On the one hand he is like Bim, and Old Delhi, who in a passive way resists any change. On the other hand he loves the Western American music, not the traditional Indian music. According to Lacom, Baba, who finds himself in a position where he can remove himself from negotiation, represents the naïve dream that one can be detached from the ‘postcolonial negotiations of power’ (Lacom: 142). It is his sisters who argue and he does not have to participate in their arguments. Baba’s disability makes him, in Lacom’s words, ‘uniquely able to simultaneously participate in imperial standards and to reject them by escaping *reality*. Because of this dual role, he becomes the focus of his two sisters as they attempt to mediate between old and new

cultural norms' (Lacom: 143). The attempt of the Das sisters to find a balance in their lives, and a balance between the old and the new India, is therefore done through Baba's body (ibid.).

The different situations of Bim and Tara are interesting to look at from a feministic perspective. As a young girl all Tara wants is to get away from her existence in Old Delhi, and she knows her options: school or marriage. Tara has always felt out of place at school, and she does not want to continue. When the handsome Bakul offers to take her away and give her love and affection, she cannot refuse him. Her sister, on the other hand, has been warned off marriage by seeing her parents' unhappy family life, and although Biswas, the family's doctor, wants to marry her, she chooses to stand on her own two feet; she chooses her brother and aunt before a marriage, but more importantly she also chooses herself and her own happiness before marriage. In her mind women should work and take care of themselves and not be dependent on any man. She has had to learn the hard way how it is to be left alone to fend for oneself but without the right tools to manage this. Although Bim chooses not to marry, her decision is in many ways expected of her since she is the oldest child. As Suchitra Mathur points out it is 'the patriarchal notion that women are chief caretakers of the family that forces Bim to remain unmarried and take care of her younger brother' while the younger siblings easily can leave home without feeling guilty (Mathur 1996). The character of Bim represents a strong woman who is there for her family in a time of crisis, even though this might mean that she does not have time to create her own life outside the family.

Bim refuses to be forced into a role expected of her if she should decide to get married. This is shown through her interactions with Dr. Biswas and his mother. After a few dates and a final meeting with his mother Bim decides to end everything between them: 'The tea party was of course a mistake and Bim scowled and cursed herself for having softened and let herself in for what was a humiliation and a disaster for everyone concerned' (90). The

different cultural backgrounds between them concerning language (Dr. Biswas and his mother speak Bengali) may represent the difficulties many Indians had in mixed relationships. Also, we see the differences in wealth, and how this created tension between them. His mother wants to know 'How many servants? What do they do? What do you pay them?' (91). We are shown how Bim does not live up to Mrs. Biswas' expectations of how a woman should behave as they 'stared at Bim munching her way through the goodies' while Dr. Biswas 'ate nothing' (90-91). Bim refuses to be looked down upon and she also cannot imagine to be expected to fill the role Mrs. Biswas wants her to fill. Angry and disappointed she leaves their apartment, and is determined to find her own way home: 'I'll go back alone,' she said, her voice rising too high. 'Really, I *want* to, I'd *like* to' (92). Bim realises that if she agrees to marry Dr. Biswas this will only add more responsibilities to her life, rather than making life easier for her. Dr. Biswas realises Bim's position later on in the novel: 'Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others - to your sick brother, and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them' (97). Mrs. Biswas' reaction towards Bim at the lunch is symbolic of an Indian culture in change. Coming from an Anglicised family, Bim would once have received great respect, whereas Mrs. Biswas, who cannot even speak English, would have been considered a woman of less rank. These roles are changing with the partition, as Indians are searching for a new identity in which they can feel more at ease.

Bim's refusal to marry further symbolises the contrast between tradition and modernity. As a woman living in modernity Bim can take care of herself, and will not end up as her aunt did, living on other people's mercy. The division between modernity and tradition in marriages is also shown in the Misra family. The young men there, who enjoy the slow traditional life style of Old Delhi, have been left by their modern wives as they wanted to live in New Delhi and 'cut their hair short and give card parties, or open boutiques or learn

modelling' (151). The old ladies of the Misra house, however, were left because they were too traditional, and their men 'were too modern, too smart' (ibid.). This shows how Old Delhi is a place where traditional values are stronger than in New Delhi. In many ways it is ironic that Bim, who longs for modern female roles, prefers Old Delhi over New Delhi. The Misra girls who fit the old traditional life style of Old Delhi, have never appealed to Bim as she finds them boring and uninteresting. Tara, on the other hand, who moved out of Old Delhi, seeks and enjoys their company. This shows that both Tara and Bim are women who stand in between tradition and modernity, but in different ways.

In *Clear Light of Day* we see the two women's thoughts and memories. As already mentioned, the novel starts with the present time, then moves back to past memories which still control the characters' lives, and then we are given the present time again. Only by going back and dealing with their past can the characters move forward. Desai has captured a world so real that Bim's and Tara's memories, attitudes to life, and their passing moods, change and disturb them from one moment to another (Jena 1989). The Das house is one world and several worlds at the same time. The home in itself is one world separated from the outside world. The siblings and their aunt have created their life here. As they grow up things change. What was once one world is now many worlds. Raja and Tara feel the need to seek their own worlds and adventures and they create new lives outside their childhood home. Bim's situation is the same as before except now she is alone. Her world has changed dramatically and she now creates a world of her own in their old home where she holds the central position. She never leaves or goes to social events, only she and Baba are left.

Bim, even though she did not leave, is still scarred by the events of the summer of 1947. All the people that Bim loved the most disappeared that summer, and she has to face the new situation all alone. Raja points out that 'everyone's become a refugee' (66) and this

implies that also Bim has become a refugee, a refugee trapped in her own home, in past memories.

The British upbringing has left an impact on Bim and how she is as a person. In a way she has become an anomaly. She lives in an environment which she does not completely fit into, and the family situation she has created for herself as a grown up differs from some people's expectations of how a woman should live. Bim does not like New Delhi, in contrast to the other characters, who prefer this place because it is where everything exciting takes place. Old Delhi resists in a way the passage of time since it refuses to change. Bim's house in Old Delhi functions in many ways as a symbol of everything that happened in India during and after the partition. The atmosphere of the house is described as pressing and heavy, as something that is about to explode any minute. At the same time the summer of 1947 is described as threatening: a frightening dust storm and fanatically singing koels are metaphors for the advancing violence that is in the air, all combined with an overwhelming and almost unbearable heat. This reflects the stormy and frightening time before the partition. It builds up the tension of the novel, and prepares us for something bad to happen. The partition in turn is followed by riots and fighting between different groups, and the implications this has on the people of India is shown through the different families; the Das family who are Hindus, and the Hyder Ali family who are Muslims. When Tara visits her childhood home as a grownup she notices that everything has decayed around the house and nothing is being taken care of any more. It is as if all was left behind when Raja and Tara left, when their parents died and Mira-masi died. Deaths and emigration have left an impact on the house as well as on India as a whole. Nothing is the same anymore. Although there are moments of joy and moments of happiness, the lightness is always overcome 'by the spirit of the house' (20). The houses around also have a looming spirit and they all look depressed: 'On the other side of their garden were more gardens, neighbours' houses, as still and faded and shabby as theirs, the

gardens as overgrown and neglected and teeming with wild, uncontrolled life' (23-24). Both the house and India fall apart at the same time, leaving all involved emotionally scarred.

Sharma also suggests that the house is 'a symbol of Bim's mental condition' (Sharma: 115). Although her life evolves as she goes from childhood to adulthood and becomes a professor, her mental state of mind does not change, it has stagnated, just as the house does not change.

Growing up, the relationship with her siblings meant the most to Bim, and especially the relationship she had with her brother Raja. When their father died everything changed. Even though he had not taken care of them emotionally he had supported them economically, and it was his intention that Raja should take over the company. Raja, however, wants to follow his own dreams and passion, and refuses to comply with his father's plans. Bim is begging him to think it over but Raja only ridicules her by suggesting that Baba can do it just as well as himself. Raja does not manage to see why Bim is worried about the business or about anything else when there are much more important things going on around them with the partition and the city in flames, with everyone becoming 'a refugee' (66). His mind is set on Hyder Ali and his family who are driven away. Bim is thus given the full responsibility for the whole family; 'the rent to be paid on the house, and five, six, seven people to be fed every day, and Tara to be married off, and Baba to be taken care of for the rest of his life' (67). Bim notices that Raja is slowly turning more and more away from her and the family during his teens. His need to be independent and to follow his desire, and also to be allowed to grow into a man, draws him away from his sisters and aunt in this period. As their relationship is getting weaker, he leaves them to follow his true love and to finally begin his life. Whether Raja leaves for political or personal reasons we are never told explicitly in the novel, but Bim clearly sees his leaving as a personal choice. 'Bim, whose closeness to Raja excludes Tara, is, in turn, left behind as Raja turns away from Hindu and family to an alien language, and a cultural and masculine other – both a quasi-father figure and male society – with whom she



can feel no identification' (Ho: 38). The letter also signifies the differences between Raja and Bim as persons. Where Bim realises her responsibility towards Baba, Raja does not. He also shows through his letter that he is no longer as connected to Bim as he was as a child. His inability to see her economical vulnerability shows that he is unaware of how his actions place Bim in a situation where she will be dependent on his mercy, a situation she has tried to avoid her whole life. Bim's wish was to be an independent woman, and although she works for a living she is still dependent on Raja not to claim a higher rent than what they currently have. The letter is important because it shows how the once so close sister and brother have now drifted apart. Raja, perhaps without being aware of it himself, marks the distance between him and his sister through the letter. This shows us that Raja, as a man, is not capable of seeing the vulnerability in his sister and her position. Bim, who has a dream of not being dependent on a man, is through the letter forced to rely economically on her brother. The fact that Raja is the one that makes her so vulnerable symbolises in many ways the different statuses between men and women in India at this time. As children they were allowed to be equal, but as they grow up and Raja enters a new world he is no longer able to see his sister as he once did.

#### 4: MORE ON SYMBOLISM AND IMAGRY

‘It would be best to have a cow,’ Aunt Mira said excitedly, and the children at the door jumped in surprise and joy at the unexpected boldness of her imagination. ‘The gardener could look after it. He could bring it to the door and I could watch it being milked myself every morning. We would have pure milk for the children’.

The mother looked at her as if she were mad. A cow? A cow to give them milk? She shook her head in amazement, but now the ayah came up and loudly supported the aunt, and then the cook. It seemed the milkman was a rogue, had swindled them all, they did not wish to have anything to do with him. Faced with a rebellion of this size, the mother capitulated and the cow arrived, led in by the gardener on a rope to be examined and admired like a new bride even if she had her calf with her. (107).

The cow lived for one week before it one night, when the gardener had forgotten to take it in for the night, made its way towards the well and drowned in it. The tragic death would be a constant reminder for *Mira-masi*. Later it was discovered that it was impossible to pull the cow out of the well, and over time this made the well polluted with green scum. In India cows are holy, so for any Indian the sight of a drowned cow would be horrific. On a symbolic level the holy cow which drowned might be a sign of what is awaiting India; death and violence as a consequence of the partition. It can also be seen as a representation of old traditions dying. Just as the holy cow dies, Mira dies. Her death shows that the India that did not care for the weakest must die, and that new female roles must be created in order to get a more democratic society. It is also interesting that Bim and her aunt are drawn towards the well. *Mira-masi* is drawn towards it because she feels guilty for the cow’s death, and later Bim is drawn towards it because she feels guilty for her aunt’s death. After *Mira-masi* has finally died she appears as a ghost in front of Bim: ‘Do you know, for a long time after *Mira-masi* died – for a long, long time – I used to keep seeing her, just here by the hedge –’ (41). Bim is in a way surrounded by ghosts; the guilt over her mother and the guilt over her aunt’s death are two ghosts that follow her both inside and around her home. It is therefore interesting to notice that the colour of the scum in the well is green. Green is said to represent the need for healing and reconciliation within oneself (URL: 3). Bim’s journey in becoming a whole person is all about coming to

terms with memories that haunt her from her childhood. The colour is also interesting on a political level. In 1906 All India Muslim League created what is Pakistan's flag today. The party was one of the forces behind the partition in 1947. The green scum in the well might be a symbol of the fights and disagreements between Pakistan and India, and how the two countries need reconciliation and healing in order to move on with a new and healthy relationship.

*Who is that third who walks always beside you?  
When I count, there are only you and I together  
But when I look ahead up the white road  
There is always another one walking beside you  
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded  
I do not know whether a man or a woman  
- But who is that on the other side of you?*

These lines from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) appear twice in Bim's mind. *The Waste Land* (1922) was written as a consequence of what T. S. Eliot saw as the moral and spiritual death of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From 1917 to 1925 Eliot worked for Lloyds Bank in London, and from this district he received inspiration for his poem. As Eliot wrote about the death of London as it once was, Desai's novel is about the death of British India. Both Eliot and Desai use imagery in order to express anxiety. The green scum in the well is always linked to death, whether it is the cow and its calf, Mira-masi, or Bim's dreams connected to it. In that sense the green scum can be said to symbolise the death of colonial India in order to give life to the new India. The colonial India, just like Bim, also needs reconciliation and healing in order to move on. The new India, just like Eliot's London, is also filled with modernity; new American pop culture and Americanised values. While Eliot writes about London and how the city, once familiar to him, is made strange and unreal, one can say that Desai writes about a once familiar country which is now in transition. When Eliot asks 'what is the modern self like?' Desai asks 'what is the new India and its people like?'.

*Clear Light of Day* is filled with sounds and smells, and as one reads it is impossible not to hear ‘the koels in the morning, and the dog barking in the night, and the mosquitoes singing and singing’ (3). These sounds and smells function symbolically on different levels in order to stress the importance of certain events. Mynah birds are heard throughout the novel, often where one needs a break from an awkward silence; ‘Bim said nothing. In the small silence a flock of mynahs suddenly burst out of the green domes of the trees and, in a loud commotion of yellow beaks and brown wings, disappeared into the sun’ (6). The dog is also used whenever there is an unbearable silence or whenever Bim needs an excuse to get out of an unwanted situation. After her first date with Dr. Biswas Bim desperately wants to go home, and her dog, Begum, is her rescue. Dr. Biswas wants to invite Bim to meet his mother, and Bim longs to get out of the situation she finds herself in. ‘This was worse than anything she had feared. Growing darkly red, she said hastily “Yes, but I must run – I must see if Raja – and my aunt – you know my aunt – and Begum is barking. Begum stop!”’ (87).

In addition to adding noise, life, and colour to the story, animals are also used in order to point out different feelings in the characters, and they also function as symbols of what is going to happen in the future. The insects and mosquitoes may represent the feeling Bim has from time to time of the people around her, the constant responsibilities of taking care of people, and later Tara’s annoying voice that wants her to speak about Raja or Dr. Biswas. Mosquitoes are not very visible but they tend to concentrate around one’s ears, becoming almost unbearable to listen to. Bim feels at one point that the mosquitoes are ‘like the thoughts of the day embodied in monster form, invisible in the dark but present everywhere’ (152). She can hear their annoying sounds, just like she can hear her sister’s voice and questions about Dr. ‘what was his name’ and about fears one gets when ‘one is old’ and about the letter from Raja (152-153). Everything Bim wants to forget is heard over and over again in her mind, and Tara’s voice and her own thoughts become just like the annoying mosquitoes

that will never go away. Baba is also in a way like a mosquito, and once in a while when Bim is exhausted and angry the buzzing sound from the insects are heard in the background.

Animals also represent lost memories from the past, and some animals are used as a symbol of how time stands still in Old Delhi compared to the outside world. The novel begins with the arrival of Tara to her old home, and it shows how she is discovering all her childhood memories slowly for each day that passes, and realising that there is some comfort still in the slow motion of the world that surrounds the house. Surprised to find that the old rose walk is still present in their garden she is thrilled when she discovers that also her childhood snail is still there, 'making its way from under the flower up a clod of earth only to tumble off the top of the side – an eternal, miniature Sisyphus' (2). For Tara, her life as a diplomat's wife and the mother of two daughters that know only of the modern world, there is something pleasing and comforting in moments like this, where she can be only herself, without thinking about being how her husband or daughters expect her to be. The slow movements of the snail might represent the old, traditional way of living which she once was a part of, and it represents something in the past, something that time has not managed to change (Sharma: 108). Seeing no change in the house and its surroundings, Tara does not manage to see the changes in her sister, and how bitterness and bad memories from the past are ruling her life. The old childhood memories are in a way good for Tara, but for Bim they represent the good relationship she used to have with her brother, and they become a memory of something lost. The garden and the 'old rose walk' also contribute to make a clear distinction between the two sisters and where they are in their lives. For Bim it is a part of her everyday life, something that has always been. The thought of it not being there is surprising to her, just as it is equally surprising to Tara that it still exists: "Bim, the old rose walk is still here." "Of course" said Bim' (2).

Baba's gramophone is also central in the novel. He picked it up from Hyder Ali's house in the summer of 1947 after the owners had been forced to leave their home. His daughter, Benazir, had left it with some old British and American music, a clear contrast to the music that used to be played in Hyder Ali's house. Baba loves his gramophone and plays it every day. It gives him peace and joy, and at the same time it hinders the silence in penetrating the house. The gramophone is in a way Baba's way of expressing himself. He does not speak a lot, and has trouble in communicating verbally. Being mentally challenged and dependent on everyone around him, Baba is very vulnerable, and according to Sharma Desai 'suggestively reveals the cruelty and heartlessness of the world' through his character (Sharma: 110). Baba is the person to blame if things are difficult. Both Tara and Bim choose to push him at times in order to cover up their own insecurities. Baba is a representative of a society that has failed in taking care of the weak and innocent people. He lives in his own world and is most happy when he can be left alone, inside the house where it is safe, and where he can play his gramophone. At one point the record needs to be turned around as it has come to a halt, but before Baba can do this Tara interrupts him. She is used to her husband's way of dealing with things, and she feels that it is right of her to push him to go to the office. The music is off and the only thing heard is Tara's voice: 'The room rang with her voice, then with silence. In the shaded darkness, silence had the quality of a looming dragon' (13). Baba is no longer protected against the silence that is penetrating his room, or against voices that ask him to do things he is not capable of doing. As Tara leaves the room he tries to bring the music back, but something is wrong: 'The needle stuck in a groove, "Dream-in', dream-in', dream-in'" hacked the singer, his voice growing more and more officious' (14). Baba gets depressed and feels defeated when the music is gone. The sounds from the garden grow louder and louder with the koels and they 'drove him into panic' (14). The koels are driving him crazy and he leaves the room and storms out to the street with no one stopping him, not

even Tara who sees him leave. Baba is not himself, he is afraid and alone, and he does not know how to cope in the world. Shocked by the sight of a man on a white horse whipping it, hearing the horse scream, hearing the man scream, hearing the whip again and again Baba becomes terrified: 'Baba raised both his arms, wrapped them about his head, his ears and eyes, tightly, and, blind, turned and stumbled, almost fell, but ran on the back up the road to the house, to the gate' (16). The song chosen is also interesting, and not chosen by a coincidence. 'Dream-in' represents in many ways Tara's dream that Baba will listen, that he will be able to go to the office, and that he will grow up. Although she knows deep down that this will never happen she still wants to believe in the dream. The lyrics that filled the room screams to her that only in her dreams will Baba be able to do what she requires of him. Tara, feeling guilty afterwards, only waited for a sound from the gramophone, knowing that the sound would mean joy and stability for Baba as it is 'a secure cocoon for him' (Sharma: 110). The gramophone is also important for Baba's siblings as it 'symbolises the power to silence the grievous silence of Baba and the house' (Sharma: 116).

Time is an important element of this story. As Desai points out herself, 'Time (history) is the fourth dimension... The present makes little sense unless one looks into the past and considers the future' (Fakrul: 97). One of the things that Desai does is that she separates between the new and old worlds, the modern and the traditional, the metropolitan and the decaying. New Delhi and Old Delhi are used to illustrate the differences between the two poles: 'Old Delhi is symbolic of Bim's life which is monotonous and has the air of her past. Tara's life is like New Delhi which is developing fast' (Sharma: 109). Bim and Baba live in the old city, and Bim represents those who have difficulties in letting go of the past:

Old Delhi does not change. It only decays. My students tell me it is a great cemetery, every house a tomb. Nothing but sleeping graves. Now *New Delhi*, they say is different. [...] I never go. Baba never goes. And here, here nothing happens at all. Whatever happened, happened a long time ago – in the time of the Tughlaqs, the Khiljis, the Sultanate, the Moghuls – that lot (5).

It is through Bim that we see how time has a deep impact on people's lives. Time has in many ways destroyed Bim's emotional life, as she has continued to carry painful memories rather than to go on with her life: 'Her development from adolescence to adulthood brings her nothing but the experiences of anxiety, pain, troubles, and despair' (Sharma: 112). This is why the mentioning of Raja and his daughter's marriage brings painful memories for Bim, who suddenly experiences her childhood and youth over again, and the feeling of loss and betrayal makes her angry and resentful. We follow her on a journey into discovering her true self, and into recognising that the past must be left in the past in order for her to move on.

The opposition between the old and new can also be traced in the conversations between Bim and her sister Tara. Tara left their home years ago, wanting to escape the tiresome and dull everyday life of Old Delhi, and to improve her social status through her marriage. "How everything goes on and on here, and never changes" she said. "I used to think about it all [...] and it is all exactly the same, whenever we come home". "Does that disappoint you?" Bim asked dryly, giving her a quick sideways look. "Would you like to come back and find it changed?" (4). Bim continues her indirect critique of her sister in her ironic comments: 'All that dullness, boredom, waiting. Would you care to live that over again? Of course not. Do you know anyone who would – secretly, sincerely, in his innermost self – *really* prefer to return to childhood?' (4). With these comments she makes Tara feel uncomfortable and insecure. There could also be some jealousy hidden behind all of this. While one sister could not leave Old Delhi and all the responsibilities that followed it, the other dared to leave, and got to live an exciting life. Bim is in a way mocking her own life, and also her sister's life - her own life for not being as interesting and fulfilling as it could be, and her sister's life because she never did anything herself, she only follows her husband wherever he goes. By doing this Bim guards herself against any thoughts her sister might have about her life. Bim knows she has not been around much, so she safeguards herself by



saying that she and Baba must seem funny to someone who has travelled as much as Tara. Behind her ironic and sometimes quite cruel comments to her sister we can from time to time see a vulnerable and lonely person. Bim knows there is another world outside of Old Delhi, yet she does not want to take part in it. Tara does not understand why things always are the same around the house, whenever she comes back. In her opinion the house and the garden could need some care, and Baba should definitely grow up and start acting more like his age: 'Why did Bim allow nothing to change? Surely Baba ought to begin to grow up and develop at last, to unfold and reach out and stretch' (12). Baba is here compared to a flower that needs nourishing in order to grow. Tara has always viewed Bim as a strong woman who does not need help from anyone: 'She had always thought Bim so competent, so capable. Everyone thought that – Aunt Mira, the teachers at school, even Raja. But Bim seemed to stampede through the house like a dishevelled storm, creating more havoc than order' (148). Again Desai uses imagery related to nature. But whereas Baba is compared to a flower, Bim and her situation is linked to a force that creates devastation and chaos. Suddenly Tara realises that Bim too is only human, and cannot manage everything on her own. Tara had only managed to see Bim 'through the lenses of her own self, as she had wanted to see her' (ibid.). Feeling ashamed of her own escape and leaving Bim alone with their sick aunt, Tara needs to know that she can be forgiven in order to move on. "“Oh Bim,” she moaned through her fingers. “I didn’t come and help – help chase the bees away –”” (149). A childhood memory from when Bim was once attacked by bees is Tara’s way to apologise to her sister. At this point she is too nervous to say that she is really sorry for leaving Bim behind and the bees symbolise all the worries Bim had to take care of on her own, and also the guilt Tara feels for abandoning her.

As the two sisters talk about the past and the memories they have, Tara allows herself to speak perhaps more freely than she had intended, and reveals to her sister that she did in fact run away from the house and its depressing atmosphere when she decided to marry Bakul

instead of going to college. Assuring her sister that the atmosphere of the house has changed since Bim took over after her parents she says that ‘it seemed that the house was ill, illness passed from one generation to the other so that anyone who lived in it was bound to become ill and the only thing to do was to get away from it, *escape...*’ (156). This is the first time Bim realises that she has been too occupied with taking care of everyone’s physical needs so that she has been incapable of seeing the true feelings and reasons of why her sister, and possibly her brother, left.

As the novel moves towards an end we sense that Bim and her surroundings are about to change. Bim is filled inside with anger due to her sister and her husband, and due to Tara’s and Raja’s seemingly good relationship. She feels that her two siblings have turned their backs on her, as she is no longer good enough for them. While they share an expensive lifestyle Bim and Baba cannot afford their kind of luxury.

Bim saw all their backs, turned on her, a row of backs, turned. She folded her arms across her face – she did not want to see the ugly sight. She wanted them to go away and leave her. They had come like mosquitoes – Tara and Bakul, and behind them the Misras, and somewhere in the distance Raja and Benazir – only to torment her and, mosquito-like, sip her blood. All of them fed on her blood, at some time or the other had fed – it must have been good blood, sweet and nourishing. Now, when they were full, they rose in swarms, humming away, turning their backs against her. (153).

Bim has made herself the centre of her world for so many years, but when Tara points out that everything looks old and grey Bim is forced to take a closer look at the life she has created for herself. Being a proud person Bim does not want to seek help from her family, although she clearly needs and wants Raja to come and help her with the business. Bim’s anger is compared to the summer heat ‘rising to its peak, or like the mercury in the barometer that hung on the veranda wall, swelling and bulging and glinting’ (163). Baba’s record is also symbolic of Bim’s bottled up emotions at this point as the music sings out ‘Don’t fence me in’ (ibid.). After so many years of hiding her emotions, Bim has to come to terms with her anger. Her childhood dreams of becoming a great heroine are in her own words ‘Down at the

bottom of the well – gone, disappeared’ (157). Just as the cow ended its life there, as *Mirasi* was always drawn towards it, Bim has always felt she would end up there as well.

Although she is not there physically, she feels that the person she once dreamed of being, a heroine like Joan of Arc, died, and symbolically ended her life in the green scum of the well.

Looking back on everything Bim realises that her anger and resentment towards her brother due to his letter are caused by the great love she had for him before he left: ‘Her love for Raja had had too much of a battering, she had felt herself humiliated by his going away and leaving her, by his reversal of brother to landlord, that it had never recovered and become the tall, shining thing it had been once’ (165). Bim realises that if she wants to have a better life for herself where anger and bitterness are gone she will have to dig deep into herself and find a way to forgive her brother. And not only that, she also has to be able to forgive herself for the unfair treatment she has given Baba who too often had been the perfect person to be angry with: ‘These were great rents torn in the net that the knife of love had made. Stains of blood that the arrow of love had left. Stains that darkened the light that afternoon’ (166).

As everything fell apart during the summer of 1947 Bim stopped looking forward, and her life is filled with unresolved issues from her youth which she will not let herself forget. By keeping the letter Raja sent her she makes sure she will never move forward, not realising that the one she is hurting the most is herself. By shutting out the people she loves the most she cannot have a meaningful life: ‘Although it was shadowy and dark, Bim could see as well as by the clear light of day that she felt only love and yearning for them all’ (165).

Remembering her loved ones and the conflicts they have had over the last years Bim seeks her history books in order to calm herself down. Ironically, she finds the record of Aurangzeb. He ruled the Mughal Empire from 1658 – 1707. He rejected his loved ones, and ended up regretting this when he was dying. *Many were around me when I was born, but now I am going alone*’ he said, and Bim cannot forget this sentence. Realising that she will not share his

fate Bim rejects the past that has been filled with bitterness and anger and decides to destroy the letter Raja sent her. Only when she decides to tear up the letter and start over again can she allow herself to begin 'the clearing of her decks, the lightening of her own bark' (169). Only then can she be content with her life, only then can she appreciate Baba's presence and see him as something more than a buzzing mosquito in her ear, and only then can she see 'the clear light of day'. As Bim realises this her attitude becomes more positive and the atmosphere around her changes. She realises that she has to get rid of everything that has been in her way, and all the clutter that has been lying around in her home must be moved away as well in order for her to get a new start in life: 'she has to clear off old misunderstandings and apprehensions, and has to cleanse her mental and emotional being of the dust of time' (Sharma: 115). As a dust storm sweeps up everything outside her house, Bim cleans up everything inside her house, leaving it as if 'a storm's been through it' (170). The image of the storm symbolises how Bim has to clear her mind from old, bitter memories. Only when she has fought her inner storm can she free herself from the past, and begin a new life without grudge and hate. As the novel moves towards an end and Tara and her family have left Old Delhi, Bim is filled with peace. 'Everything had been said at last, cleared out of the way finally. There was nothing left in the way of a barrier or a shadow, only the clear light pouring down from the sun. They might be floating in the sun – it was vast as the ocean, but clear, without colour or substance or form' (177). The calmness that Bim experiences in this moment is again showed through imagery from the nature as Bim's emotional condition is expressed through the timelessness of the ocean.

When it is only Baba and Bim left at the very end of the novel the two of them are invited over to the Misra house to celebrate Mulk's guru's birthday. Although Mulk has been ridiculed for his passion for music he has been allowed to celebrate his guru. The neighbourhood of Old Delhi are invited to join them, and they all gather around in the Misra's

garden. Their house which is filled with people brings back memories of the past: 'it was really the unaccustomed noise and bustle in the old house, the return to old times' (177). As Bim comes to terms with her past, Old Delhi, returns in a way to the pre-partition era where the songs of the Hindu god Krishna and his beloved Radha can co-exist with Urdu poetry, kept alive by the artist Mulk and his guru: 'resurrected and rejuvenated, Bim suggests a resurrected and rejuvenated India' where both she and the country can find a meaning and understanding in their existence (Jena 1989). Mulk is conscious of old Indian traditions, but he also sees a possibility for renewal and change, and he recognises that the two can co-exist:

Mulk's song sung in that pleasant, resonant voice, bound them all together in a pattern, a picture as perfectly composed as a Moghul miniature of a garden scene by night, peopled with lovers, princes, and musicians at play. And there was still another element to this composition [...] Mulk's song rose to a joyful climax, his voice swelling to its fullest strength and the *tanpura* and the *tabla* rising and expanding with it, so that they all arrived together at the peak from which they could do nothing but come rolling down, hilariously, into laughter, congratulation, and joviality (180).

In contrast to Mulk's 'sweet and clear' voice, his guru's voice is old, sharp, and filled with the 'bitterness of his experience, the sadness and passion and frustration' (182). While Mulk represents something new, his guru represents someone who is 'at the end of his journey' (182). While Mulk symbolises the modern and the future, his Guru symbolises the old and the past. This reminds Bim of the eternity of time: '*Time the destroyer is time the preserver*' (182.). The music is no longer threatening or annoying, but soothing and comforting. It becomes a way of dealing with the loss and trauma of the past years, and the sound heard is the one thing that links memory and time, and brings everything together.

She saw before her eyes how one ancient school of music contained both Mulk, still an immature disciple, and his aged, exhausted guru with all the disillusionments and defeats of his long experience. With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her family with all their separate histories and experiences – not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from that same soil, the same secret darkness. That soil contained time, past and future, in it. (182).

Just like time links Mulk and his Guru, Sharma suggests that Bim's 'grasp of the nature of time makes her believe that she and her sister and brothers have changed because of Time, but they still belong to the past and hence to one another also' (Sharma 1991: 120). As these changes appear in Bim and her surroundings the mute Baba finally becomes vocal. Playing with Tara's daughters he is heard 'calling out excitedly on winning five hundred points' (171). In addition to this we see that he listens to Bim when she speaks to him, something he has not done earlier in the novel, giving Bim a nod at the very end to indicate that he has heard (and understood) what she has said to him (182).

## CONCLUSION:

As shown through this thesis, *Clear Light of Day* is a novel which deals not only with the loss of a culture and the familiar, but also a novel of nation building, of reconciliation with oneself and family members. We are given insight into how many Indians experienced the trauma of partition: the loss of language, of culture, of sound and music, and of family and friends. We see how everything is connected to the soil they live on, and how through the transcending time, links could be re-established. Through Bim and Tara we are taken back to the late 1940s. Through their family and their surrounding environment we are shown how India dealt with the partition of the country. Desai's use of symbols and imagery is present in almost every sentence of the novel, making it unique and fascinating to read. Through the novel we learn that life is a journey of becoming, and nothing is ever completed – the journey will only move on (Tiwari: 3). This goes for Bim, Tara, and Raja, and all those who live in Old Delhi and who try to live their lives as fully as possible, even though their lives were once turned upside down. It is also true of India as a country. The journey of finding itself, and of making a new nation out of old traditions and the new modern lifestyle, is a journey that will last for years, and will never be fully completed. Just as people grow and change, India too will grow and change. What is important is the ability to look forward, to move forward, rather than to live in past memories. The novel ends optimistically, leaving room for reconciliation for all parts involved. However, Desai's novel does not solve all the problems that were created due to partition over night. Just as Bim can only take small steps on her way to reconciliation, India too will have to be patient, and take small steps on 'her' journey of becoming.

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